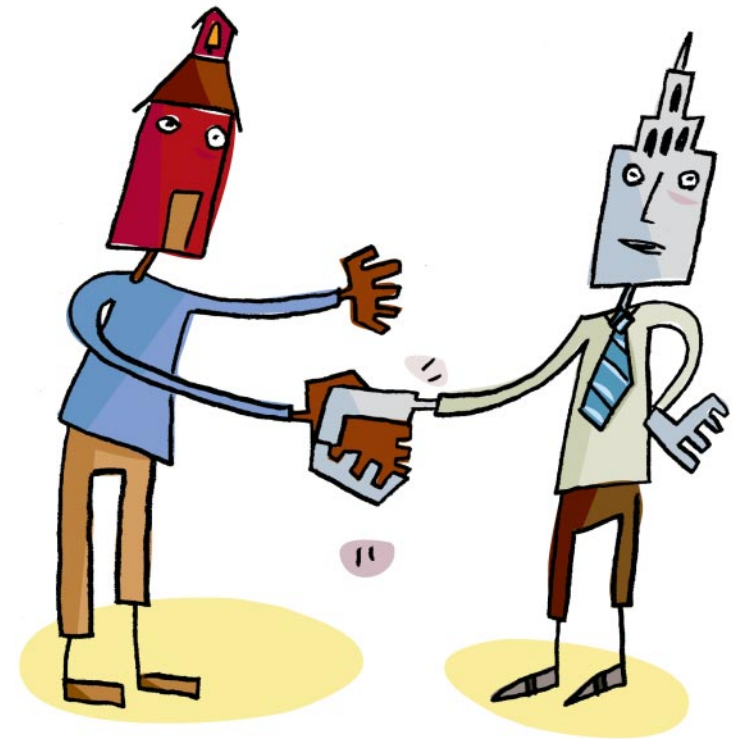


# Charter School Partnerships

*... 8 key lessons for success*



Charter School Partnerships ... 8 key lessons for success



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# Charter School Partnerships

*... 8 key lessons for success*

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Boulder Preparatory High School, *Boulder, Colorado*  
Charles R. Drew Charter School, *Atlanta, Georgia*  
Construction Careers Center, *St. Louis, Missouri*  
Della Lamb Elementary Charter School *Kansas City, Missouri*  
East Bay Conservation Corps Charter School *Oakland, California*  
Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy *Flagstaff, Arizona*  
Friendship Edison Public Charter School *Washington, D.C.*  
Genessee Community Charter School *Rochester, New York*  
John Baker Charter High School for Incarcerated Youth, *Raleigh, North Carolina*  
KIPP Academy, *Bronx, New York*  
Mesa Arts Academy, *Mesa, Arizona*  
Nuestros Valores Charter School, *Albuquerque, New Mexico*  
Orange County High School of the Arts, *Santa Ana, California*  
Palm Beach Maritime Academy, *West Palm Beach, Florida*  
Pueblo School for Arts and Sciences, *Pueblo, Colorado*  
Ryder Elementary Charter School, *Miami, Florida*  
Sallie B. Howard School for the Arts and Education, *Wilson, North Carolina*  
School for Arts in Learning, *Washington, D.C.*  
Schoolcraft Learning Academy, *Bemidji, Minnesota*  
Taos Municipal Charter School, *Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico*

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The research has also benefited from the dedication of several individuals, including Diane Becket, Jennifer Hicks, and Lucy Okumo, who traveled the U.S. to help collect data for the study.

This guidebook on charter school partnerships was prepared by the Center on Educational Governance at the University of Southern California. The Center on Educational Governance combines research aimed at building new theories about what makes schools work with action research and dissemination activities to spread best practices broadly and deeply. Our aim with this guidebook is to provide useful information to the many educators and community leaders across the country engaged in charter school partnerships.

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We dedicate this book to the risk-takers who launch partnerships and their partners who contribute to improving public education.

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## Introduction

If you are considering forming a charter school, you are following in the footsteps of thousands of others who were similarly motivated to create new educational opportunities for students in their community. Maybe you are driven by dissatisfaction with local school options or a desire to establish a school that will offer a unique curriculum.

Researchers from the Center on Educational Governance at the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education spent two years speaking with nearly 150 people involved with forming and managing charter schools that shared one common characteristic: They chose to enter into partnerships with nonprofit, for-profit and public organizations to help establish and operate the schools.

This guidebook represents the experiences of the 22 charter schools visited across the nation and offers a variety of lessons learned about how to form and sustain mutually beneficial partnerships. As you consider your plans and ideas, you can learn from others' experiences to help guide your own choices.

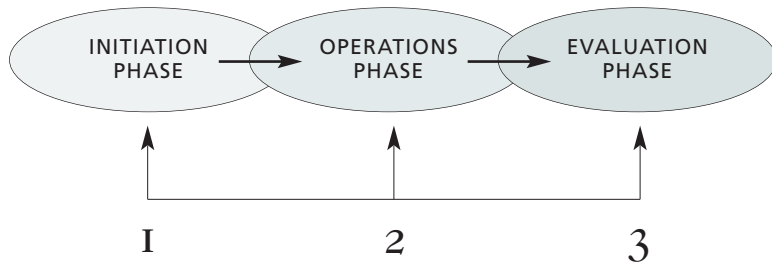
Before we begin, it is important to note that all charter school partnerships are not alike. The types of partnerships that exist between charter schools and other organizations can be distinguished based on three characteristics:

- > What is the nature of resources exchanged in the partnership?
- > What is the form of the partnership?
- > What is the depth of involvement in the partnership?

PARTNERSHIP DIMENSIONS

<i>Resource exchange</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Depth</i>
Financial resources	Informal agreements	One-level involvement
Human resources	Formal agreements	Multi-level involvement
Physical resources		
Organizational resources		

Also, we found that partnerships do not spring up fully formed. Rather, they progress through a series of stages, as shown in the diagram below. The lessons in this guidebook will help you progress successfully through this process.



In the first phase, *initiation*, the existence of a leader to champion the effort helps organizations that are motivated to partner develop the purpose for the partnership.

In the second phase of partnership development, the *operations phase*, certain structures and processes are created for decision-making and for disseminating information to help the partnership function.

Finally, in the *evaluation phase*, the effects of the partnership are assessed. Depending on the results, the partnership may continue as is or be modified to improve its outcomes.

The types of organizations charter schools elect to partner with vary widely but commonly include the following:

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Types of Organizations (examples)</i>
<b>NONPROFIT</b>	Community-based organizations ( <i>recreational centers, neighborhood outreach agencies</i> ) Cultural institutions ( <i>museums, local performance groups</i> ) Educational institutions ( <i>private colleges, universities</i> ) Faith-based organizations ( <i>churches</i> ) Nonprofit educational management organizations Race/ethnic-based organizations Social service providers ( <i>child and family welfare agencies</i> ) Private foundations
<b>FOR-PROFIT</b>	Education management organizations Local businesses
<b>PUBLIC</b>	Cultural institutions ( <i>art museums, science museums</i> ) Educational institutions ( <i>school districts, community colleges, universities</i> ) Public health providers ( <i>hospitals</i> ) Government/Municipalities ( <i>city offices, mayor's office</i> ) Police departments

These partners provide a variety of financial, human, physical, and organizational resources. In the charter schools we visited, partners offered resources ranging from direct financial support for one-time or ongoing needs, use of classroom or athletic facilities, access to speakers or mentors, expertise in developing curriculum, business/management infrastructure and expertise, internship or work-study opportunities, and know-how in promoting the school through the media, to name just a few. Associations with established partners can also lend needed credibility to bolster the charter application, attract students, and broaden community support for the school.

Before delving further into the planning process for your charter school, take some time to review the following eight key lessons taken from our interviews with leaders from charter schools and their partners. Their experiences may help you decide if a partnership would benefit your charter school.

lesson **I.**

Weigh the Benefits  
and Costs of Partnering



*Is partnering  
really an  
advantage?*

**“You can’t take every partner that walks through the door.... I have to ask, ‘Is it going to cost me more in time and money than it’s worth?’”**

An established partner can offer a range of resources—additional finances, a unique curriculum, access to facilities—needed for a school’s survival. Some charter school leaders acknowledged that, were it not for the funds provided by a partner, the school simply would not exist. Contributions ranged from a few thousand dollars for supplies to assistance obtaining a \$20 million bank loan. Partnerships also provided access to a range of facilities including classroom space, athletic fields, and meeting halls. Further, partnerships imparted credibility to newly-formed charter schools. In some cases, charter schools used the reputations of their partners to gain access to commercial credit, while others leveraged it to tap into publicly available funds such as grants and awards.

Charter school leaders are often equipped with strong education credentials, but many lack business experience. Partners with business expertise can alleviate the need for school personnel to become experts in hiring, contracting, budgeting and other business tasks. In this way, partners can help fulfill administrative duties and let the charter operators focus on curriculum and instruction.

However, partnerships also require resources—time and human resource costs—to actively build, operate, and sustain the relationship. Partnerships are rarely one-way streets; if the costs exceed the likely benefits, you may want to reevaluate whether it’s in your interest to make a deal.

POINT-COUNTERPOINT:

### **The Benefits and Costs of Sharing a Facility**

**BENEFIT:** “Because we are all in one building, it is simple. We don’t have a lot of meetings but we have a lot of conversations. It’s not like everything has to be written in a memo format. We are small enough that things are informal which is a benefit... We can meet in the hall or go up and knock on someone’s door.”

**COST:** “There was a conflict of personalities in the past. It was sort of ‘us against them.’ But, we have to share the facility. You have to eventually figure out that the partnership is an advantage and work together.”

**BENEFIT:** “I like the idea that I can drop my child off in the morning and they are physically here the whole day, because of the immediate after school program.”

**COST:** “We have struggled to integrate programs at times. For example, the after school and summer programs need to use the school facilities. Teachers have been concerned about sharing the facilities; they feel like they’ve lost their turf.”

**BENEFIT:** “The facility at the cultural center is very grand, so to be able to have graduation here signals to the students and their families that the child has really accomplished something. That kind of confidence and pride is more important than anything they can learn in school.”

*Get ready  
for the politics  
of partnering*

Often, a partnership with a well-established organization provides greater name recognition to help promote your school. Some charter schools that were launched with the support of prominent businesses, community members or local politicians benefited from immediate community acceptance, while others utilized assistance from partners to navigate the application process and secure funding or resources for other student needs.

However, partners also need to be prepared for possible negative attention from partnering with a charter school.

- > Partners may become subject to requirements for open meetings and other public access rules. Since charter schools receive public funds, private partners may have to make certain school-related decisions in an open forum.
- > Community opposition to charter schools can carry over to the partner—even one that enjoys high public esteem.
- > If the students fail to perform to expectations, even a well-regarded partner could find itself with a share of the blame.

“A big part of our success in the beginning was having the company name. **Having a partnership with a major corporation** is a great benefit in many ways. There was national publicity when we opened. We were full in two months of opening our doors.”

*Can you  
give as good  
as you get?*

Some partnerships are tightly defined and the contributions of both sides complement the charter school’s goals. In such cases a partner may offer access to curriculum enhancements or special programs, mentors or specialized equipment or facilities that truly enhance the educational experience for students and teachers. In turn, charter schools often supply eager student volunteers or interns, as well as a network of families to support the partner in other beneficial ways. *In the case of a school partnered with an art museum, students gained access to artists, program advisement and the museum’s facilities in exchange for access to funding from the charter school.*

However, in some cases the partner organization may provide a service unfamiliar to the teaching staff and administration. The time costs associated with figuring out how to take full advantage of the opportunities available can be frustrating and deny students any real benefit. *In the case of a charter school that partnered with an expeditionary learning organization, a major challenge was figuring out how to integrate the new curriculum into the school’s existing educational program.*

You also need to beware of unbalanced situations, so that one of the partners does not

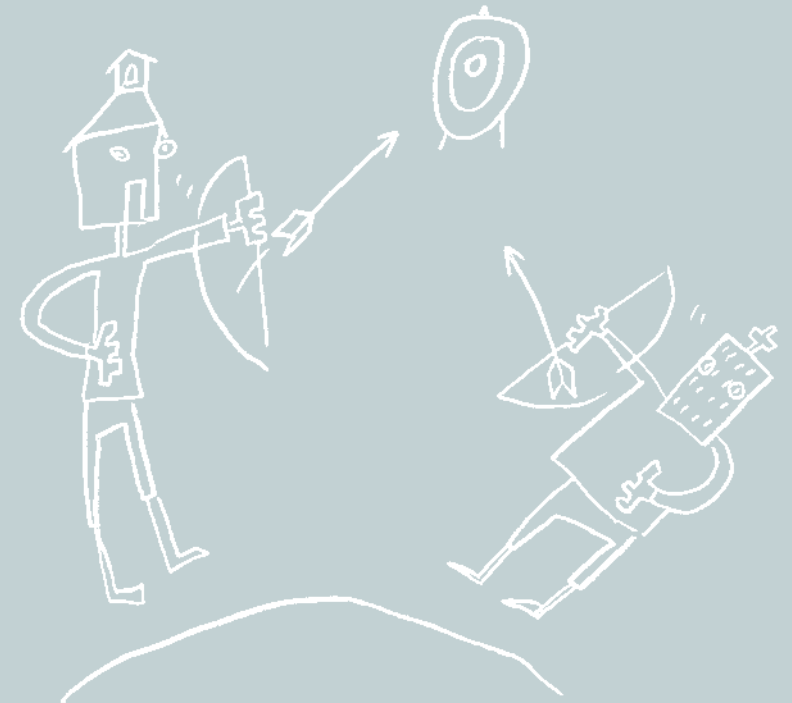


feel that it is providing more than its fair share of time and resources. Individuals or organizations that put other projects aside to focus on opening or operating the charter school should consider how this will affect their other work. Commitments of staff or facilities that seemed like a good idea at one time may ultimately breed resentment among staff or other constituents.

“Opportunity cost issues set in—**other issues that were shelved** in order to focus on our partnership with the charter school don’t go away and **eventually need to be put back on the front burner.**”

## lesson 2.

### Do Your Homework and Choose Your Partner Well



*Trust is the  
foundation*

A crucial factor when deciding to form a partnership is whether or not the two parties can trust each other. Without a fundamental sense that the other side is going to “deliver,” or do their utmost to uphold the principles of the partnership, it can be difficult to feel comfortable collaborating on key educational programs, fundraising and other tasks essential to the partnership’s success. For this reason, the personal relationships between partners are often key to establishing a high level of trust.

**“Partnerships work because of personal relationships. We have trust and rapport. They know I will deliver.”**

*Common goals help  
partners stay focused*

Many charter school leaders reported that the best partnerships are born from a unified vision of goals and objectives. In some cases, partners may simply share a philosophical approach that supplies the drive and enthusiasm to make the relationship work. In other cases, partners might have similar approaches to enriching instruction and curriculum. Charter schools that find themselves tied to partners with differing goals may have trouble accomplishing the desired objectives, not to mention managing and sustaining the partnership.

**“In our partnerships, we are trying to marry education and business in a way that few organizations have successfully done in the past.”**

*Partners with  
complementary needs  
are partners indeed*

Partnerships also succeed on the basis of needs that complement one another. Over time, charter schools have formed partnerships with a wide range of organizations with an equally varied number of assets. Some of the best relationships emerged from an ability to provide each partner with the materials, resources and staff to satisfy operational needs.

In some cases, charter schools may be able to use facilities a partner can no longer maintain without help, or provide a needed investment in a redevelopment zone that helps spur neighborhood recovery. Often, charter schools can provide interns at a partner organization that might have trouble recruiting new trainees, in exchange for access to educational programs normally reserved for more advanced students.



## What sealed the deal for you?

- A:** "We had a common belief that education is critical for kids to be successful and contributing citizens."
- A:** "The similarity in mission and their focus on world cultures, language, and social responsibility helped.... Philosophically, we had no problem."
- A:** "[They were] the kind of partner you die for. They are our 'ace in the hole' for making this work."
- A:** "Everybody wins on this one. We get fine arts courses aligned with the college curriculum for our students.... Our students get community college credits, while still enrolled in our high school."
- A:** "The museum complements our curriculum so completely; ... that's what their collection and expertise is in."
- A:** "We clicked. We had a similar vision."
- A:** "People at [the school] were warm, friendly, and engaging. They had good hearts and were not about the bottom line."
- A:** "We both want to give back to the community. Also, communication, dialogue, honesty are all prevalent, making them a good match."
- A:** "The main thing is that for it to work right demands an incredible amount of commitment and they were willing to give 100%."

## *Can you both commit?*

A partnership may look great on paper and make a lot of sense to the people who conceived the idea, but the relationship will rarely be sustained without long-term commitment from both sides. A few important points to keep in mind are:

- > Entire organizations have to stay committed to the partnership over time, even if leadership changes or budgets fluctuate.
- > Organizations with multiple layers of staff that become involved will need the buy-in from everyone in order for the partnership to work.
- > Organizations requiring the support of external stakeholders should realistically assess whether those distant participants will share the same level of enthusiasm for the partnership.

"You can't make it  
without **commitment.**"

## The Partnering Prowess of One Charter School Leader

We talked to Joanna Lennon, founder and CEO of the East Bay Conservation Corps in Oakland, California about opening a charter school and her ensuing search for good partners. Here's what this veteran community leader involved in partnering had to say:

*Q: When did you start the East Bay Conservation Corps (EBCC)?*

A: I started the EBCC in May of 1983. I learned that I could contribute more to the greater good by working at the local level. Also, working at the local level has the potential to create models which have national and international relevance for replication.

*Q: Tell me about the decision to open the EBCC charter school.*

A: My role at the EBCC is to provide the vision and the leadership for embarking on new endeavors which address issues of social change and education reform. What I'm really good at is seeing connections and envisioning what is possible.

The reason the EBCC decided to start a charter is because we had a twenty-year history of working in partnership with schools and districts designing and implementing programs which engaged young people as active participants in their communities and found that there were limitations in our roles as a partner. The charter school movement provided us with an opportunity to develop a school with a very specific vision, mission and guiding principles from the ground up where we had the autonomy and freedom to try new things. We also wanted to explore the idea of how partnerships could play a very important role in sustaining public education, particularly given the limited available ADA (average daily attendance) funding in California.

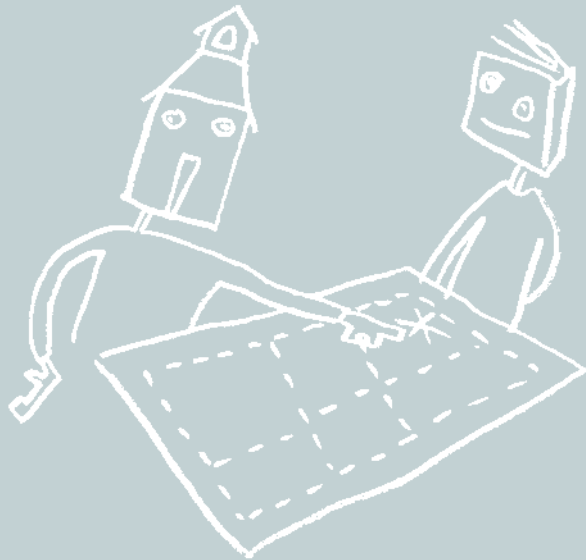
*Q: The charter school has a lot of different partnerships. How were they established?*

A: The EBCC has a long history of developing partnerships in the communities we serve including partnerships with local nonprofits, city municipalities, colleges and universities, foundations and the business community. We realized that the vision and mission of the charter school offered a truly compelling opportunity for partners to reinvest in the civic purpose of public education while at the same time furthering their own goals. This was really a win-win situation for us and for our partners because both benefited substantially. For example, one of the largest construction companies in the nation, Webcor, provided us with significant planning and renovation of our nearly 100 year old school site. This relationship developed because I happened to see an advertisement during *60 Minutes* about how Webcor prided itself in giving back to the communities where they did business. Also, it just so happened that the CEO of Webcor was a member of the same congregation where I attend church and so there was a natural opportunity to approach him. Not everyone would necessarily feel comfortable pursuing such a relationship and yet we have found again and again that taking chances is well worth the risk, because you will never get anything unless you ask and drawing on relationships is the best place to start. What Webcor got out of the partnership was not just the satisfaction of doing good work in the community, but a lot of good media coverage which enhanced their business. In addition, this partnership led to Webcor's involvement as a leader in the community in new ways.

*Q: What advice do you have for other charter school operators interested in starting partnerships?*

A: You need to be clear and strong about your vision and mission but also need to be fearless in exploring opportunities which seem far fetched. The best partnerships are based not just on a shared commitment to a vision or outcome but also on distinct and significant benefits to each partner.

lesson **3.**  
Clearly Define  
the Partnership



*Agree on  
an agreement*

Selecting your partner requires a great deal of thought and effort, but equally important is how you choose to structure the partnership since it will help define the relationship for years to come.

Arrangements can range from an informal “handshake” or a somewhat more structured memorandum of understanding (MOU) to a contract or lease with legally binding obligations. Each level of commitment carries positive and negative aspects.

- > An informal arrangement is usually based on personal relationships in which both sides feel a strong commitment to the ideals of the partnership.
- > MOUs provide clearer guidelines for partner responsibilities, but do not carry the same legal implications as formal contracts.
- > Contracts and leases are legally binding documents that typically obligate both sides to provide a set level of service or face certain consequences.

Informal relationships benefit from the flexibility inherent in any agreement that is based on the goodwill of two parties. However, if there are changes in management, or if the organizations’ circumstances change, the partnership could face several challenges without any recourse for partners.

With more formal MOUs, contracts or leases, there is less ambiguity about what each side will contribute, alleviating many potential conflicts that can arise as different people

cycle into roles that affect the partnership. However, formal agreements also create a perception of “enforcement” which can create a relationship that seems too rigid.

In more complex arrangements, such as with Education Management Organizations (EMOs) that provide support services ranging from basic transportation assistance to whole-school management, detailed contracts are often necessary and advisable because of the extent of services provided. However, they also should be flexible and open to renegotiation at specified periods.

*Accountability  
planning: devise  
and conquer*

Along with an agreement comes the need to develop an accountability plan that details the goals of the partnership and partner responsibilities. Accountability plans should address:

- > How the partnership will be evaluated
- > The consequence of poor performance
- > A course of action to terminate the partnership

Accountability can be measured in a number of ways, including feedback from teachers and students to determine if they are benefiting from their contacts with the partners. Many charter schools rely on evaluation forms for teachers and students to provide feedback and, in some cases, parents are surveyed to find out their perceptions of the partnership.

Periodic audits and performance reports can also be mandated in a formal agreement. Funding sources often require evaluations and reports to justify the use of their money. If your school is subject to oversight from a board of directors, the board will likely require periodic reports on performance that will be evaluated against an accountability plan.

“...We, as partners, have to evaluate our fiscal viability, which means **building in systems to improve our practice.**”



## Let's Talk Accountability

*Q: How do you deal with poor performance in your partnership?*

**A: "It's too early to tell. The partnership just started less than a year ago and most of our time has been spent getting faculty hired and the curriculum approved."**

**A: "There are many structures in place that are more therapeutic than punitive to help schools that are not performing well."**

**A: "If the graduation rate doesn't reach the county's goal of 80%, foundations wouldn't want to put money in. Plus, we'd lose our charter after 5 years."**

**A: "There are no consequences. We're not pulling the money if the success is not at the expected level. If it fails, it fails, but we couldn't risk not trying it."**

**A: "We are not blindly grateful to our partners. We have needed to dissolve partnerships in the past. If they don't work out, we move on."**

**A: "If it's something we can fix, we fix it, but we know we can't please 100% of the people 100% of the time, so we don't try to."**

**A: "We vote with our feet."**

# Lesson 4.

## Setting Things in Motion: Creating Structures for Participation



*Views around town:  
how to run superior  
partnerships*

What's the most important factor to ensure your partnership will operate smoothly?

“They don't feel ‘entitled’ to our help, so they're not unpleasantly demanding.”  
— *Bishop Hall Charter School*

“One of the things we believe contributes to failure is a lack of planning. We had a three year planning process, so we really understood the infrastructure of the partnership before we opened the charter school's doors. That's what makes it work.”  
— *East Bay Conservation Corps Charter School*

“You have to always be open and honest with one another or else the partnership won't work.”  
— *Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy*

“It's like a good marriage. You need to come to the table with who they are today, not who they were yesterday. Forgiveness instead of finger-pointing.”  
— *Gennese Community Charter School*

“Commitment to education on the part of all involved. There are no coasters at the charter school or at the university. It is an active partnership.”  
— *Pueblo School for Arts and Sciences*

*Governance of  
the partners*

Operating a partnership requires processes and methods for sharing ideas, making decisions and developing a collaborative environment. When assembling a partnership, pay careful attention to the structures put in place to raise, discuss and decide important issues. You might ask yourself the following questions:

- > Will you use informal meetings to address issues on an ad hoc basis?
- > Should you create formal committees that meet at regular intervals?
- > Should there be a decision-making body to which the committee members report recommendations?
- > Will a committee structure put a damper on the creative process the school is trying to foster?
- > If the committees are divided equally between school and partner representatives, who will have the final say?

Members of the partner organization who serve on school committees or boards have the potential to become ambassadors for the charter school, if they have a positive experience in the role. On the other hand, if the number of committee meetings and obliga-

“...This partnership operates  
with **dialogue and consensus.**”



tions becomes onerous, partner representatives could become tired of the responsibility and become less enthusiastic advocates for the school. It is important to maintain a careful balance between full inclusion in the decision-making process and over-exposure.

*The 3 C's:*

*Communication,*

*Communication,*

*Communication*

A collaborative governance structure is strongly supported by an open dialogue that not only keeps news and information flowing between partners, but also fosters a feeling of openness that encourages people to contribute and share.

In addition to top-down information sharing, it is important and helpful to foster an environment in which teachers and staff feel that their ideas are valued and expected. The information flow, whether formal through letters or meetings, or informal through conversations and emails, helps to coordinate activities, fine-tune programs and distribute management duties.

“...We're creating an atmosphere where we can have **good, honest conversation**. The key to our partnership is to have day-to-day people actively involved.”

## Communication is key



Email is great, but human contact is essential. You can't build partnerships over email.

— *Partner leader*

Communication is critical. If you don't have the one-on-one, partnering is really difficult.

— *School leader*

We have constant communication...everyone is so open and willing to listen to suggestions and offer possibilities.

— *School leader*

We have a very open partnership.... It's not a very hierarchical set-up at all...It's an open door policy which is good because we get feedback to the people who can make changes right way.

— *Partner leader*

In the end, so many things succeed or fail because of the communication involved. We've worked hard to make that communication ongoing, clear and direct.

— *School leader*

There is a significant feeling on both sides that more communication and learning from each other are high priorities.

— *Partner leader*



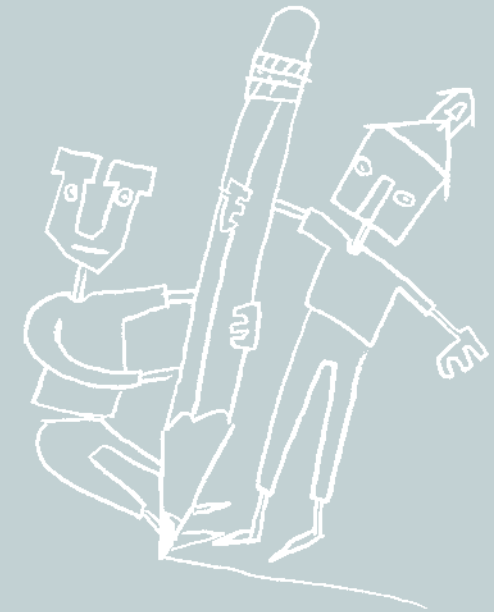
*Learn to share  
...your knowledge  
and skills*

While partners may bring complementary skills to a partnership, team-building or other joint-training can facilitate working together. Both sides may find it useful to gain a deeper understanding of their partner's expertise. School leaders may want to gain more business experience, while a corporate or non-profit organization with business skills may benefit from more educational training.

Over time, consider including partners in staff retreats or planning meetings that can expose them to the inner workings of school operations. Giving them insight into how you plan and implement educational goals might improve the way they coordinate with you. In the same spirit, school officials should be prepared to learn more about their partner's interests to gain some insight into how they approach opportunities and problems in their arena.

# lesson 5.

## Leverage Your Resources, Create New Ones



*Sharing costs vs.  
bearing costs*

Partners may find that they can share many facility and staff costs as a way to limit the duplication of resources. This is one important way that both parties can benefit from the partnership. Some areas that offer immediate potential for cost sharing include:

- > Facilities and other capital expenses
- > Administrative support staff
- > Professional services, such as fundraisers, writers and other consultants
- > Operating expenses, such as office equipment, insurance and other incidental costs

To the extent that resources can be shared, the clear advantage is to be able to maximize as much of your budget as possible for meeting the core needs of the school.

*Fundraising  
never ends*

Fundraising is an essential element to any charter school's success. There is a minimum level of funding needed to keep the school operating that must be sustained each year, and there are fundraising targets above that level that pay for the enhanced curriculum your school offers.

Each funding source has a unique structure and may be conditional on a particular budget period or purpose of use. Schools and their fundraising staff must carefully balance the source of funds received with the type of expense it will cover. One-time funds are generally not suited to funding long-term pro-

grams. Also, grantors may require status and performance reports, receipts or accounting reports, as a contingency for fund disbursement or future grants.

Some charter schools were able to “piggyback” staff that had experience fundraising for their partner organizations to help bring in funds for the school. Other charter schools established foundations to act as the fundraising arm of the school. In one case, a charter school required board members to pay \$5,000 a year in “board membership,” a significant source of fundraising for the school.

*Networking  
opens doors*

Partnerships offer a chance to access new networks of supporters and potential donors. You can meet individuals in professional circles who can offer introductions to groups or people with a potential interest in supporting your school. It is important to look upon networking opportunities as resources and make sure your partner is aware of your interest in accessing and building new networks.

Similarly, as a new charter school, you have much in common with other charter schools. Creating networks with other charter schools will provide additional support for your teachers and other staff members by offering opportunities to share experiences and learn from one another.

“Our partners helped us organize a **good support network**. They got us to where we are now by helping us build a county-wide arts network. We put members from different arts boards around the county on our new foundation board and that helped increase access to public and private funding.”

*Spotlight on  
Networking*

*How a leader turned eviction into a multi-million dollar charter school*

The executive director and president of the Orange County High School of the Arts (OCHSA) started his career as a junior high school teacher and then taught voice in an arts program at Los Alamitos High School in the 1990s. By 1999, “we were getting slowly but steadily pushed off the Los Alamitos High School site. The district’s enrollment was growing and we were being forced to cut our program in order to make room for the incoming students. A lawsuit was brought against us to stop the building of a new school for the performing arts in Los Alamitos, so we knew we had to get out of town. There was lots of publicity in the media around the plight of the school and I was approached by several

cities to relocate to their jurisdictions. I was shopping for a new location and the cities were interested in using the school as a ‘marketing piece.’”

The group eventually chose to open as a charter school and relocate to Santa Ana, because of the mayor’s commitment to seeing the school succeed. The mayor wanted to boost the downtown economy, which in recent years had deteriorated significantly, and intended to use the arts to help revitalize the area. Thus, OCHSA mixed well with the City’s economic development goals. In addition to pledging \$750,000/year over three years to bring the charter school to Santa Ana, “the mayor committed to helping us secure additional funding, showed us a cluster of buildings that were within walking distance of one another, and introduced us to a developer.” The developer agreed to incur the risk and cost of rehabbing three buildings downtown to OCHSA’s specifications and to then sell back the property to the school. The budget for buying, remodeling, and equipping the three buildings was \$17.2 million, all of which was covered by the developer until the school secured a \$20 million start-up loan. To help pay off their debt, the executive director and others created the OCHSA Foundation to raise money from private sector philanthropy.

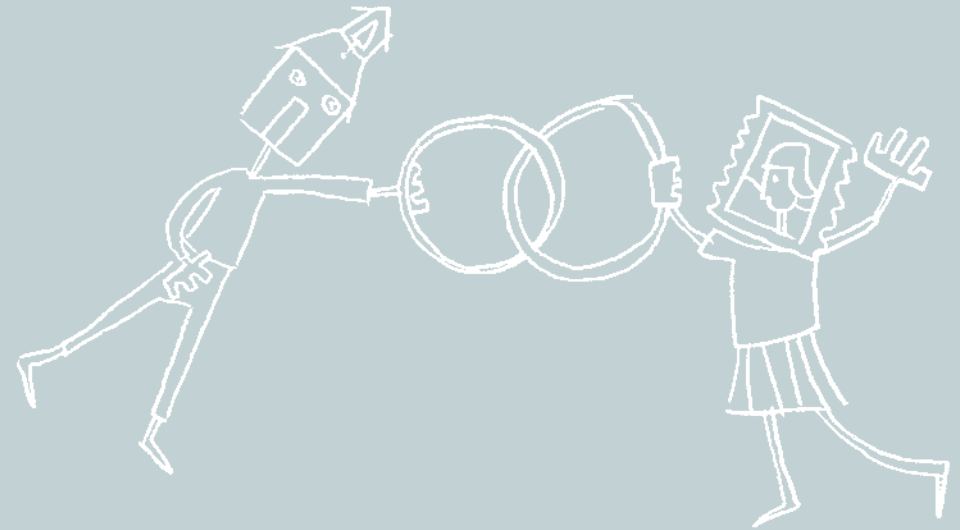
Now, the leader of this charter school can proudly state that the school has succeeded academically, with 90% of their students going

on to higher education and many taking highly regarded performing arts jobs upon graduation. He adds, “We’ve found that the quality of our instructional program has produced high levels of support and interest from our partners—the two feed off one another: Support from the partners leads to a high quality arts program, and the quality of the education program boosts the interest and support of the partners.”

# 6.

lesson

## Be Flexible and Prepare for Compromise



*Bend over backwards  
to instill flexibility*

Partnerships can be complex arrangements—not unlike personal relationships. Be prepared to accept change and compromise. You may not always need to “stick to your guns” when it comes to altering your original plans. It’s important for your partners to feel they have a voice that will be heard.

*Innovate – again  
and again*

Charter schools provide an opportunity for educational innovation. Be open to suggestions and creative problem-solving. Risk-taking represents not only a willingness to try new ideas, but it signals to staff and school supporters that creative approaches will be considered seriously. Innovation succeeds when individuals can be made to feel like they are a valued part of the process - both in conceiving ideas and implementing them. The collaborative spirit evoked by the innovation process is a means to an end itself, in addition to the new ideas that may carry with them additional advantages.

## Dialogue with a Contortionist

According to our interviews with leaders from Nuestros Valores Charter School, the charter school law in their state forbids nonprofit organizations from establishing charter schools. Here’s how a team of contortionists managed to fulfill their goal of starting a charter school anyway.

*Q: Why did you want to start a charter school?*

A: The idea came from the frustration of working with the local schools through a nonprofit youth development organization. Also, the parents were frustrated. I was a liaison between the parents and the local schools, and an advocate for the students and I kept hearing, ‘You should start a school.’

*Q: How were you able to open a charter school, given the restrictions in the law?*

A: At first, a nonprofit organization was part of the group that created the charter school. The application for the school was submitted, but was deemed unacceptable because, according to state law in New Mexico, a nonprofit cannot run a charter school. So, we shifted gears. Two employees of the nonprofit left the organization to work on a new application for the charter school and created a partnership between the school and the nonprofit. As a separate initiative, the nonprofit submitted a proposal to the state to become a ‘public management’ entity, so they could become partners with public schools in trouble. The nonprofit was one of three groups in the state to be granted this status. With this initiative, the nonprofit was granted a ‘state purchasing agreement’ and could offer ‘public management services,’ including education.

*Q: How do the two organizations work together now?*

A: The charter school was developed together with those who run the school. The nonprofit organization considers itself to be the ‘parent’ of the charter school. It took a while to get the school going initially. The school was like the ‘prodigal son’—the process of development was painful. When the nonprofit was approved as a public school management group, with the ability to manage failing schools, this opened the door for them to manage the charter school. Now, the resources and services provided include social services, advice and guidance, and support in the areas of facilities, maintenance, and curriculum development.

*Q: What advice do you have for potential operators in similar situations?*

A: Initially, the nonprofit felt the loss of the two employees who left to start the charter school, but they realized it takes more than just a school to help a child be successful. Also, partnering with the nonprofit brought in experience in areas that allowed the educators to teach the kids and not have to worry about the social services end.

## *Prepare for culture clashes*

Just because two organizations share common values and goals does not mean that all of their members will always get along. Conflicts arise between charter schools and partners for various reasons, including:

- > Personality differences
- > Differing management styles
- > Perceived inequality in a management hierarchy
- > Frustration stemming from a misperception of roles and responsibilities

Leaders can work past culture clashes by instilling teamwork, described in the following section.

## *Teach teamwork*

Instilling a teamwork approach is one way to help surmount culture clashes, promote innovation and encourage flexibility. In short, teamwork inspires a “we’re in this together” attitude that gives everyone a share in the school’s success. By making the team and the team’s goals bigger than any two people who may not get along, the potential for culture clashes is reduced. If everyone can agree they have a stake in the school’s future, then everyone has at least one thing in common upon which to build solid relationships.

# lesson 7.

## Check your progress



### *Evaluate yourself*

Charter school partnerships have a wide range of objectives that should be measured and monitored to ensure the relationship is meeting expectations. Among the qualities schools most often track are:

- > Student achievement: test scores, graduation rates, quality of universities accepting graduates.
- > Impact of the partnership: What is the value added by the partnership? Are student outcomes improved because of the partner's input? What are the costs of partnering?
- > Quality of instructional program: How are students and parents responding? What are teachers' perceptions?
- > Public interest and support for the school: Is the charter school earning the respect and trust of the community?

Schools need to take time to review both objective and subjective information to make sure they are on the right track. Test scores and graduation rates are a common measurement of student achievement, but measuring student attitudes and self-confidence can be equally important.



Evaluating the success of the partnership is also critical—periodically revisiting whether your partnership makes sense. Sampling teacher and student attitudes about how they benefit from the partnership is one method to assist that review, while another is to evaluate how partnership failures affected the school. Evaluations and informal feedback can be a good indicator of overall direction and opinion.

Find out how well the community is reacting to the partnership, if possible. Because charter schools are often so closely connected to neighborhood resources, there may be strong feelings one way or the other about its success.

“Some of these **kids have been so rejuvenated.** I know where they were when they came to us and where they are now. The majority would have dropped out without the charter school.”

## Views around Town: Evaluating your Partnership



*How do you know if you're succeeding?*

“We have a performance evaluation to learn how well the school is doing. We want to know how parents feel. It's a combination of the subjective and the standardized. We also are using a feedback tool for the first time this year to ask what WE can do better. We also hired consultants to conduct focus groups with students, staff, and parents.”

— *Agricultural and Food Sciences Academy*

“These are inner city kids looking for something to grab on to and some are doing really well—gaining life skills. Those successes are what count.”

— *Construction Careers Center*

“It's a real challenge—there's so many things going on that we don't know the impact of each particular partnership. Also, it's difficult to come up with a standard evaluation form because each program is different, so I use qualitative evaluation techniques, mostly feedback from the parents and students.”

— *Charles R. Drew Charter School*

“We've been the highest performing middle school in the Bronx for the last five years. That's an external and internal measure of our success.”

— *KIPP Academy*

“Students come back after graduating to volunteer with us. If clients come back to help you, I don't think you can get a better recommendation.”

— *Mesa Arts Academy*



*Use feedback for  
planning*

The information obtained from evaluations is meant to be more than congratulatory. If the evaluation reveals problems or simply finds areas where there is no feedback, those aspects of the partnership need to be examined to assess possible causes for those outcomes.

Some charter schools find that evaluations point out shortcomings in the management of certain programs or breakdowns in communication with the partners. Take time each year to review the evaluations with your partners to see if there are changes that can be made in the relationship to improve the situation.

*Set new goals*

To that end, fine-tuning the processes that aren't working should also lead you to enhance the processes that are working. Goal setting keeps everyone focused on improving outcomes and pushes the partnership forward toward greater success. The self-evaluation process can lead to a natural discussion about areas that school leaders, teachers and partners would like to further improve. These goals may include increasing test scores and graduation rates, expanding the types of opportunities open to students through coursework and electives, or simply deepening the relationship between the school and its partners.

**Where would you be without your partnership?**



*Della Lamb Elementary Charter School, MO  
about their partnership with a university:*

“Without support from the university, the school would be serving the same kids, but wouldn't be exposed to the give and take that we provide. They wouldn't be exposed to what we at the university can offer, including the administration and teacher specialists brought to the table.”

*Friendship Public Charter School, DC  
about their partner, Friendship House:*

“The charter school really benefited from being founded by an organization that was well known already in the social services arena and had a leader that had access to all aspects of city government. We were able to start a bigger after-school program than we probably could have otherwise because our partner had a very good reputation.”

*Palm Beach Maritime Academy, FL:  
about their partnership with a maritime museum.*

“The partnership is why we've survived. The school would never have made it without the start-up capital from the museum.”

*Sallie B. Howard School for the Arts and Education, NC  
about their partners, City of Wilson Human Relations  
Commission, Wilson Families in Action, and Americorp:*

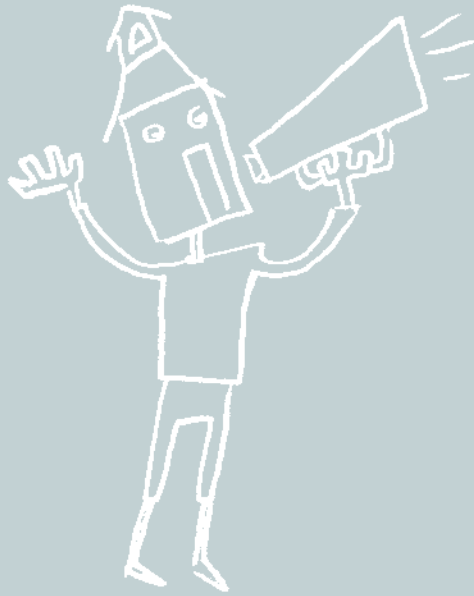
“We could not do this by ourselves. The teachers and students would not get to benefit from the range of experiences offered through our partnerships.”



# 8.

lesson

## Lead! Lead! Lead!



### *Follow a champion*

Strong leadership is crucial for a partnership's operation and survival. The impact of strong leadership is evident through the dedication of staff who believe in the school's mission. In order for charter school partnerships to succeed, they need a leader whose drive and commitment are unmistakable. Leaders motivate staff, present a vision that captivates supporters, and persist in convincing even the most doubtful observers that it is worthwhile to support the school. In short, this person is the school's champion and biggest advocate for the partnership.

### *Spotlight on Leadership*

*"The detainees needed more than just being locked up:" The story of one leader's decision to bring education to youth offenders*

The sheriff of Wake County, North Carolina was tired of arresting youth and having them "just sitting around." One year after he was elected sheriff, he started an education program for incarcerated youth at the local detention facility. Initially, he worked with judges to require sentenced youth to attend the local public school: "We would take the students to school in a patrol car and if they acted up, we would pick them up."

A couple years later he was approached by the Wake County school district to start a charter school in the detention facility. He started trying to stir up media attention for the idea of a charter school, but "the media

was never interested.” He tried a new tactic: Every Sunday he would attend a different church and the pastor always allowed him to discuss the charter school. “I was trying to get the community’s attention on the benefits of charter schools and my concerns about crime rates.”

By 1997, the sheriff gathered enough support to get the charter application approved. Currently, the charter school, the John Baker Charter High School for Incarcerated Youth, utilizes space at a local elementary charter school each afternoon. “They love us and don’t mind that our students are incarcerated. They are willing to do anything to help.” In fact, the principal of the charter elementary school has “recruited some of the high school students to tutor the younger students after school.”

In addition to the partnerships with the Wake County Detention Facility and the charter elementary school, the sheriff also established a partnership with a local community college that holds courses for adults in the detention facility. The community college expanded its programs to offer vocational classes to the charter school students.

Seven years later, the incarcerated youth of Wake County are no longer “just being locked up.” As the current principal of the charter school reported, “Everyone in the partnership is working towards what’s best for the students.”

### *Stand by your architect*

Every team may have a visionary but, without implementation, the vision may never materialize in any tangible way. Schools need people who can convert ideas to workable plans and develop strategies to implement them with the available resources. Partners who bring expertise and resources to the table need to have decision-making structures and processes in place that allow partners to share and participate effectively in the relationship. The architect creates the structure of the partnership and lays the groundwork for participation by the main players.

### *Deal with an information broker*

Balancing the flow of information within an organization is a complex task, especially when multiple organizations with different cultures work together. Successful charter school partnerships include individuals who serve as information hubs, evaluating information and directing its flow to the proper people. Because an information broker will be one of the few at the school who is familiar with all data and information, they gain valuable insights into projects, needs and potential successes that others in the organization may not see.

*Engage in  
external affairs*

There are numerous external interests that can influence the work of the partnerships. In order to manage these demands, you can enlist individuals skilled at spanning the internal and external school environments to represent the interests of the partnership, while making sure that only the most relevant outside issues are brought to leaders for action. This includes dealing with public constituents and policy organizations whose activities could be a distraction to the work of managing the partnership, as well as scanning the environment for funding opportunities.

*Next in line*

It is not uncommon to find one or two leaders driving the formation of a charter school or partnership, but there is good reason to try hard to spread leadership duties across several individuals.

- > One person simply cannot accomplish as much—no matter how good intentions are—as several people dividing the tasks.
- > Bringing diverse perspectives and ideas to the job of forming a partnership enhances the creativity that goes into developing it.
- > If the leader's primary strengths reside in some key leadership areas but not others, those weaknesses may not be addressed and problems that result from those flaws may not be remedied.

- > If too much importance or authority is concentrated in a few people simply because they are willing to take on responsibility, the school will have to scramble to make up for their loss when they leave.
- > One person may be able to provide blanket leadership skills, but will struggle to sustain the effort over the long term. Providing assistance through other personnel extends the longevity of key leaders so their most useful skills can be preserved well into the future.

“For me the big question is, **will schools be able to sustain themselves when the founders move on** and the school leaders change? A lot of what we see is the synergy of these folks.”

## What is your recipe for success?



*Agricultural and Food Sciences Academy, MN*

“Partnerships must be nurtured. It’s also important for partnerships to be a two-way street—each partner must get and receive something valuable to them. Time and resources are also necessary for successful partnerships.”

*Bishop Hall Charter School, GA*

“If you get credibility in the community from one successful project, then people know you can deliver, and that increases buy-in which, in turn, helps you with the challenge of your next project.”

*Boulder Preparatory High School, CO*

“Willingness to be open and share, to take risks, and to find the commonality of high school and college needs.”

*KIPP Academy, NY*

“Having a clear vision of where we’re going and how we want to get there.”

*School for Arts in Learning, DC*

“Flexibility, being able to make a mistake and remedy it quickly. I never want us to be a red tape kind of organization where everyone has to wait. Part of our success comes from everybody having an opportunity to change a bad situation. Make a suggestion and we will try something new. The second important factor of our success is open communication. We have had many human resources issues where people aren’t happy and morale is low. At times, there are conflicting priorities, but we’ve always been able to compromise by talking things through. There is mutual respect—a lot of strong personalities, but we have respect for each other and we’re always willing to listen to one another.”

*Schoolcraft Learning Academy, MN*

“Open communication, respect of organizational needs, similarity of vision, buy-in.”

*Taos Municipal Charter School, NM*

“Everyone is motivated for the students, making sure the kids are getting educated to be successful. There are no personal agendas or egos.”



## Conclusions

The results of our study, accumulated here into eight lessons, suggest that partnering can provide a number of important resources—financial, physical, human, and organizational—as you establish, operate, and sustain your charter school. However, the potential benefits do not mean you should leap head first into any partnering opportunity that comes your way. Along with the many positives, leaders from charter schools and their partner organizations told us about partnering pitfalls as well, including unequal partnerships, culture clashes, and time costs. We hope that you can learn from the experiences of these 22 charter schools and create positive learning environments whatever route you choose.

## Appendix

### Charter School Profiles

AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD SCIENCES ACADEMY  
Little Canada, Minnesota

*Year opened:* 2001

*Grades served:* 9-12

*School mission:* To develop lifelong learners who have high skill levels, care for others, are adaptable, and are prepared to thrive in a diverse, global, and changing society.

BISHOP HALL CHARTER SCHOOL  
Thomasville, Georgia

*Year opened:* 1999

*Grades served:* 6-12

*School mission:* To provide education programs and social services that ensure equity and excellence in the performance of all students. Students are prepared for the future as responsible and productive citizens in a global society.

BOULDER PREPARATORY HIGH SCHOOL  
Boulder, Colorado

*Year opened:* 1995

*Grades served:* 9-12

*School mission:* To encourage the pursuit of knowledge and education as an intervention for youth in crisis, and to graduate young people ready and eager to meet the challenges of college and adulthood with the appreciation of their responsibilities in the world community. The school educates by inspiring in each student an enthusiasm for learning and the self-confidence needed for intellectual, physical, and ethical development.

CHARLES R. DREW CHARTER SCHOOL  
Atlanta, Georgia

*Year opened:* 2000

*Grades served:* K-8

*School mission:* To revitalize the East Lake community, and in particular, the former East Lake Meadows public housing project, by partnering with the East Lake Community Foundation and being an integral part of its comprehensive renewal effort.

CONSTRUCTION CAREERS CENTER  
St. Louis, Missouri

*Year opened:* 2001

*Grades served:* 9-12

*School mission:* To prepare students in grades nine through twelve for the future by providing an excellent foundation in academics, broad exposure to the construction industry, and relevant vocational education preparation.

DELLA LAMB ELEMENTARY CHARTER SCHOOL  
Kansas City, Missouri

*Year opened:* 1999

*Grades served:* K-6

*School mission:* To create long-term educational and economic impact in the lives of low-income, disadvantaged, at-risk children and families by providing alternative educational and academic services in conjunction with supplemental family support services in a Missouri charter school format.

EAST BAY CONSERVATION CORPS CHARTER SCHOOL  
Oakland, California

*Year opened:* 2001

*Grades served:* K-5

*School mission:* To prepare children for their lifelong roles as citizens by instilling students with two types of literacy: 1) Academic and Artistic Literacy — the ability to read, write, speak, calculate and reason with clarity and precision, and to creatively express oneself through the arts; and 2) Civic Literacy — the ability to “let your life speak” by participating thoughtfully, responsibly and passionately in the life of the community with concern for the common good.

FLAGSTAFF ARTS AND LEADERSHIP ACADEMY  
Flagstaff, Arizona

*Year opened:* 1996

*Grades served:* 9-12

*School mission:* To develop an appreciation of the arts in the lives of its students; value leadership and interpersonal skills through experiential learning and service to others; and strengthen learning and a sense of community through the development of partnerships.

FRIENDSHIP EDISON PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL  
Washington, D.C.

*Year opened:* 1998

*Grades served:* K-12

*School mission:* To prepare a diverse cross-section of children for success as students, workers, and citizens by providing them with a world-class education.

GENNESSEE COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL  
Rochester, New York

*Year opened:* 2001

*Grades served:* K-5

*School mission:* To provide a rich educational experience that values intellectual rigor, respect for diversity, and community responsibility.

JOHN BAKER CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL FOR INCARCERATED YOUTH  
Raleigh, North Carolina

*Year opened:* 1998

*Grades served:* 9-12

*School mission:* To provide a quality high school education using qualified teachers, community resources, and other educational professionals for students who are at risk of failing or have failed in other settings.

KIPP ACADEMY  
Bronx, New York

*Year opened:* 1995

*Grades served:* 5-8

*School mission:* To help students develop the academic, intellectual, and character skills needed to enter and succeed in top-quality high schools, colleges, and the competitive world beyond.



MESA ARTS ACADEMY  
Mesa, Arizona

*Year opened:* 1995

*Grades served:* K-8

*School mission:* To provide a positive school climate for all of its students. Each student is treated with respect, and is guided in the discovery and development of their individual talents.

NUESTROS VALORES CHARTER SCHOOL  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

*Year opened:* 2001

*Grades served:* 9-12

*School mission:* To provide a quality, innovative and relevant education for youth who have struggled to succeed in a traditional educational setting. Students will become productive citizens and lifelong learners through interdisciplinary and career-based curricula in a school community of care and belonging.

ORANGE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL OF THE ARTS  
Santa Ana, California

*Year opened:* 2000

*Grades served:* 7-12

*School mission:* To support a partnership between the arts and academics; to create and maintain a nurturing community that fosters a spirit of cooperation, respect and collaboration; and to reach out and serve our entire community and celebrate diversity in society, culture, ideology, and individual expression.

PALM BEACH MARITIME ACADEMY  
West Palm Beach, Florida

*Year opened:* 2000

*Grades served:* K-8

*School mission:* To expose students to a unique integration of subject areas and to allow students to creatively apply their knowledge to practical situations. Hands-on learning is emphasized in both classroom and field experiences.

PUEBLO SCHOOL FOR ARTS AND SCIENCES  
Pueblo, Colorado

*Year opened:* 1994

*Grades served:* K-12

*School mission:* To deliver an integrated and well-balanced K-16 curriculum, anchored in the arts and in harmony with the sciences, in order to improve student learning and quality of life. Based on Mortimer Adler's Paideia Principles, the school offers an untracked, enriched educational setting in which all students succeed.

RYDER ELEMENTARY CHARTER SCHOOL  
Miami, Florida

*Year opened:* 1999

*Grades served:* K-5

*School mission:* To provide a foundation that will enable students to reach their highest potential in academics, citizenship and life skills.

SALLIE B. HOWARD SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS AND EDUCATION  
Wilson, North Carolina

*Year opened:* 1997

*Grades served:* K-8

*School mission:* To build upon and develop the achievement potential and aspirations of all students, regardless of their social or economic privilege, and to help children discover and develop their unique gifts, talents, and value to the world.

SCHOOL FOR ARTS IN LEARNING  
Washington, D.C.

*Year opened:* 1998

*Grades served:* K-6

*School mission:* To offer a specialized curriculum using the arts and creative methods to help children learn in ways that match their individual learning styles and specific needs. The focus is on developing the whole child, intellectually, emotionally, physically, and socially.

SCHOOLCRAFT LEARNING ACADEMY  
Bemidji, Minnesota

*Year opened:* 2000

*Grades served:* K-8

*School mission:* To empower students to be self-directed, lifelong learners by providing a nurturing, multi-age, expeditionary learning environment which fosters cooperation and character development.

TAOS MUNICIPAL CHARTER SCHOOL  
Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico

*Year opened:* 2000

*Grades served:* K-8

*School mission:* To provide children a public school educational alternative; to provide public school teachers with the best possible educational environment in which to teach; to involve parents and families in the education of their children; and to enhance character education for all students.